

A (Soda) Pop Culture and Fifty Years of Advertising

To celebrate its 50th anniversary of television advertising and the Library of Congress' Bicentennial Gifts to the Nation program, The Coca-Cola Company is donating a major collection of television commercials to the American people. These advertisements will serve as a multi-media archive to researchers and historians by providing a glimpse into the development of popular culture.

The gift eventually will encompass more than 20,000 television ads from across the globe and will be representative of the company's portfolio of brands. These will include products such as Sprite, Fanta, and diet Coke that are universally recognized, as well as lesser-known brands that are available only in specific countries, such as Japan's Georgia Coffee. The Library of Congress web site <www.loc.gov> currently includes a preview description of the collection with pertinent historical information and several examples of the ads. This donation to the world's largest library recognizes not just five decades of television advertising, but also a business history that mirrors changing innovations and developments in marketing over the last 115 years.

A Brief History

In 1886, John Pemberton created Coca-Cola in Atlanta, Georgia, and sold it at a local pharmacy. His partner and bookkeeper, Frank Robinson, named the product and drew the famous flowing Coca-Cola script. Atlanta entrepreneur Asa G. Candler realized the business potential of the soft drink and acquired complete ownership of the Coca-Cola business for \$2,300 by 1891. Within four years, Candler's merchandising flair, including the use of coupons, helped

expand consumption of Coca-Cola to every corner of the United States.

Until 1899, Coca-Cola was only sold as an over-the-counter fountain drink. Dubious about portable packaging, Candler sold the bottling rights in 1899 for one dollar. The first two bottling plants were located in Chattanooga and Atlanta. The success of the operations was quickly realized and by 1929, 27 countries had bottling facilities. The 1916 introduction of the patented contour bottle made Coca-Cola instantly recognizable from imitators by taste, sight, and touch. The contour bottle was granted trademark registration in 1977, a recognition awarded few other package designs.

In 1919, the Candler family sold the company for \$25 million to an investment group, led by Atlanta banker Ernest Woodruff, which soon sold stock to the public at \$40 a share. Ernest brought his son Robert aboard to run the company in 1923. Robert W. Woodruff's leadership, over six decades, took the business to unrivaled heights of commercial success and transformed Coca-Cola into an international institution.

Strong corporate leadership continued through the years and in 1981, Roberto C. Goizueta was elected chairman and chief executive officer. During his tenure, an independent worldwide survey in 1988 found that Coca-Cola

The evolution of the glass bottle for Coca-Cola from the Hutchinson-style bottle to the 20-ounce plastic contour bottle introduced in 1994.



was the best known and most admired trademark in the world. After selling, on average, a mere nine drinks a day in 1886, overall daily sales of Coca-Cola and other company products exceeded one billion per day a little over 100 years later.

Packaging and Product Innovations

Until the mid-1950s, the contour bottle and bell-shaped fountain glass defined packaging for Coca-Cola. But as the American consumer demanded a wider variety of choices, the company responded with innovative packaging, new technology, and new products. In 1955, king-size and family-size glass bottles were introduced with immediate success, followed by cans in the U. S. market in 1960. The company then accomplished several innovations within the soft-drink industry with the development and introduction of lift-top cans and bottles with lift-top crowns in 1964, and a 24-unit “Cluster-Pak” of cans and steel cans without tin coating in 1969. Also, in 1985, after more than \$250,000 in development costs and rigorous testing by NASA, the “Coke Space Can” was accepted for its first mission in outer space. By 2000, the company had introduced a new generation to the famous contour bottle— first with the 20-ounce plastic version (1993) and later with an 8-ounce embossed contour bottle (2000).

In recent decades, The Coca-Cola Company has created new beverages to meet the changing desires of consumers, starting with Fanta in 1960. Sprite was launched in 1961, followed by TAB, the company’s first low-calorie drink in 1963. The debut of diet Coke in 1982 marked the first extension of the Coca-Cola trademark to another product. These new products continue today, adding to the company’s portfolio of more than 230 brands worldwide.

Advertising Through the Years

Throughout its history, The Coca-Cola Company has attempted to capture the spirit of the times through its advertising. From the first promotional calendars produced in the 1890s, the company linked itself to the popular styles and attitudes of the era. The company initially used the work of the top artists

of the day, including Norman Rockwell and N.C. Wyeth, to illustrate calendars and magazine and newspaper ads. In a series of Coca-Cola Christmas paintings from the 1930s to the 1960s, Haddon Sundblom helped transform the modern image of Santa Claus.

By 1950, the company was ready to advertise on television. Sponsorship of particular programs allowed the company to expand its relationships with performers from radio programming. The first television commercial for Coca-Cola was created for an Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy special on Thanksgiving Day in 1950. That was quickly followed by Walt Disney’s television premiere, *One Hour in Wonderland*, on Christmas Day the same year. The company also sponsored *The Adventures of Kit Carson* and *Coke Time* with Eddie Fisher over the next three years.

Commercials from the “The Sign of Good Taste” and “Be Really Refreshed” advertising campaigns of the 1950s used techniques such as animation and featured notable performers such as the McGuire Sisters, Connie Francis, Emmett Kelly, Anita Bryant, and the Brothers Four. When the “Things Go Better With Coke” slogan was introduced in 1963, it was adapted for the international market and translated into numerous languages. A number of popular singers, such as the Supremes, the Moody Blues, Jan and Dean, Roy Orbison, Petula Clark and Ray Charles, recorded music for this campaign.

Throughout the 1960s, advertising for Coca-Cola echoed the changing forces within American society. The 1969 “It’s the Real Thing”

The company’s 1971 “Hilltop” advertisement, featuring the song I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke, celebrated the world’s diverse cultures.



In October 1979, the Coca-Cola commercial featuring professional football player “Mean Joe” Greene and 12-year-old Tommy Okon made its debut.

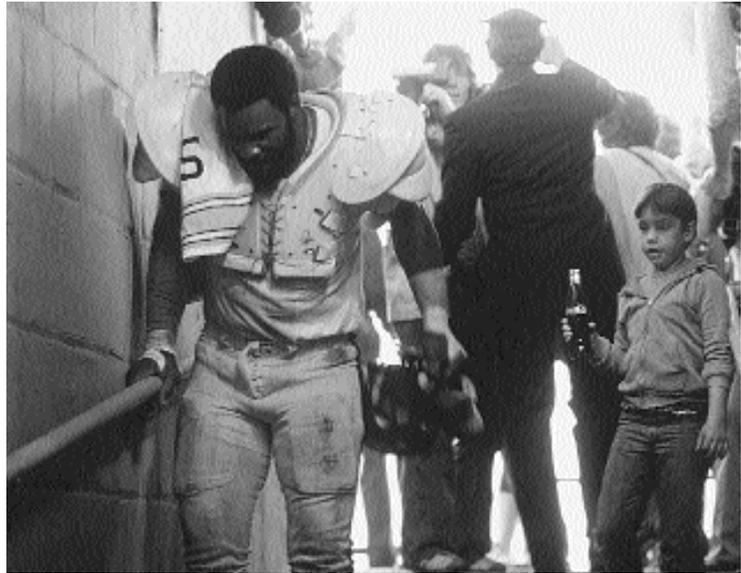
campaign featured one of the most popular advertisements ever created. Known as “Hilltop,” this television advertisement encouraged the world to sing and to celebrate the planet’s diverse cultures.

The advertisement’s song, *I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke*, was originally introduced unsuccessfully on the radio. The idea for this song was developed after one of the songwriters noticed weary travelers laughing and sharing stories over bottles of Coca-Cola, which inspired him to see Coke as more than just a soft drink. In early 1971, the radio ad was shipped to stations around America, but the few times it was played, the public paid no attention.

The company decided that the campaign needed a visual stimulus to be effective. However, producing this television spot turned out to be a star-crossed project, including three separate filming attempts in two countries, numerous recasts of the chorus, and what was at the time one of the largest budgets devoted to a commercial. “Hilltop” was released in the United States in July 1971, and by November, the company and its bottlers had received more than 100,000 letters of praise. Two new versions of the song were created for radio play and at one point both were on the pop charts. The sheet music continues to sell today and the ad consistently has been voted one of the best of all time.

During the mid-1970s, as the nation questioned its direction and values, Coca-Cola promoted positive values in the “Look Up, America” campaign. Coke advertisements showed typically American scenes from football players to a cattle herder to country singers. The patriotic phrase “from sea to shining sea” was used in the voice over. The central message of the ad was, “no matter what you’re doing or where you are, look up for the real things” (like Coca-Cola).

A few years later, the company’s “Have a Coke and a Smile” marketing theme introduced a commercial that captivated audiences almost to the extent that “Hilltop” had eight years earlier. This ad, featuring Charles E. “Mean Joe” Greene, a defensive lineman from the Pittsburgh Steelers professional football team, and 12-year-old Tommy Okon, debuted in October 1979.



The ad in which a young boy talks to his hero, offers him a Coke, and is rewarded with the player’s jersey was filmed over three days at a stadium in New York. Greene and Okon performed countless retakes, with Greene consuming 18 bottles of Coca-Cola the final day alone. The campaign was immensely popular and continued its life as a 1981 made-for-television movie. The company repeated the ad’s concept in Brazil, Argentina, and Thailand, following the same plot but starring renowned soccer players.

In 1985, after 99 years, Coca-Cola had become part of the tapestry of American life. When the company introduced a new taste for Coca-Cola in North America that year, television played an important advertising role. After the public demanded the return of the original Coca-Cola, the company brought it back as Coca-Cola classic. As a result, two distinct ad campaigns were created for the marketplace—one for the new taste of Coca-Cola and another for Coca-Cola classic.

The “Red, White and You” campaign for Coca-Cola classic celebrated the modern American spirit and featured recognizable landmarks, such as the Golden Gate Bridge and the Coca-Cola neon sign in New York’s Times Square. In surveys, 75% of respondents said they considered Coca-Cola classic a symbol of America, so this campaign was a natural fit. In contrast, the “Catch the Wave” campaign for the new taste of Coke was youthful, leading edge, and competitive. To appeal to young America, The Coca-Cola Company enlisted an unusual

“spokesman”—Max Headroom, a computerized character with a synthesized voice.

In 1993, the “Always Coca-Cola” campaign marked a dramatic shift in the company’s advertising. The campaign, which ran for seven years, took a variety of approaches, using humor, music, animation, and even Shakespearean parody, to build on the product’s connection with the public. The ads ran around the world and included innovative technical approaches, such as computer animation.

One commercial in this series, “Northern Lights,” introduced what would become one of the most popular symbols of Coca-Cola advertising, an animated polar bear. The bear appeared in six commercials for Coca-Cola, including two spots for the 1994 Olympic Games and a holiday ad with the bear’s family. Another ad, “Charity,” featured the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and promoted the spiritual aspects of love, charity, and forgiveness.

In January 2000, The Coca-Cola Company launched its latest ad campaign. Using the slogan “Coca-Cola. Enjoy,” the campaign was designed to show people around the world how Coca-Cola

adds a tiny bit of magic to the special moments in their lives. One of the spots, “First Experience,” follows a boy anticipating what a Coca-Cola will taste like, comparing it to a kiss. While “Coca-Cola. Enjoy” was a worldwide theme, local countries created individual commercials relevant to local tastes and cultures. For example, the melody developed with the campaign is adaptable to a wide range of musical styles. Even as the campaign began, there were 140 versions of the tune in 40 languages.

For the past 115 years, through its multi-media advertisements, packaging innovations, and the introduction of new products to fit the tastes of consumers wherever they may be, whatever they may be doing, Coca-Cola has become a part of the lives of people around the world. The new partnership between The Coca-Cola Company and the Library of Congress will ensure preservation and public accessibility to this corporate advertising history.

Philip F. Mooney is manager of The Coca-Cola Company’s Archives Department and is a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists.



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